

Chapter

1

Idealism and Education

- Development of Idealism
- Development of Modern Idealism
- Idealism as a Philosophy of Education
- Critique of Idealism in Education

Idealism is perhaps the oldest systematic philosophy in Western culture, dating back at least to **Plato** in ancient Greece. Of course, philosophy and philosophers existed before Plato, but Plato developed one of the most historically influential philosophies of education we have. From ancient times until the modern era, idealism has been a dominant philosophical influence, and even though that influence has waned at times, it is still a major philosophy and stands as an alternative to our contemporary materialist culture. In terms of American philosophical thought, idealism has a long history, and **educational ideology in the nineteenth century was greatly influenced by German idealism**. Although idealism is not as strong as it once was, it is still alive in certain areas such as contemporary religious studies and certain aspects of moral philosophy.

Generally, idealists believe that ideas are the only true reality. **It is not that all idealists reject matter** (the material world); rather, they hold that the material world is characterized by change, instability, and uncertainty, whereas some ideas are enduring; thus, **idea-ism** might be a more correct descriptive term for this philosophy. We must guard against oversimplification, however, in order to get at a fuller and more wide-ranging understanding of this complex philosophy.

To achieve an adequate understanding of idealism, it is necessary to examine the works of selected outstanding philosophers usually associated with this philosophy. **No two philosophers ever agree on every point**, so to understand idealism or any other school of thought properly, it is wise to examine the various approaches of individual philosophers. This will be accomplished by an exploration of three areas: Platonic idealism, religious idealism, and modern idealism and its characteristics.

8 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

DEVELOPMENT OF IDEALISM

One leading thinker of ancient Greece was **Socrates (469–399 B.C.E.)**, who challenged the material concerns of his contemporaries. Socrates went about Athens questioning its citizens, particularly the **Sophists**, about their “**unexamined**” way of life. Socrates saw himself as a kind of gadfly who prodded people into thinking. He was later brought to trial in Athens and was executed for his beliefs. Although Socrates’ ideas were only transmitted orally through a dialectical question-and-answer approach, **Plato wrote them** down and detailed both the **Socratic method and Socrates’ thinking**.

It has often been debated whether Plato added to these dialogues, because he wrote about them many years after they occurred. The general view is that **Plato added a great deal** and put the dialogues in a literary form that has had enduring value. Because the ideas of Socrates and Plato are considered almost indistinguishable today, scholars generally refer to these writings as **Platonic philosophy**.

Platonic Idealism

PLATO (427–347 B.C.E.) Plato was a Greek philosopher who started as a disciple of Socrates and remained an ardent admirer of him throughout his life. Plato is largely known for his writings in which **Socrates is the protagonist** in a series of dialogues dealing with almost every conceivable topic. **Two** of his most famous works are ***The Republic*** and ***Laws***. After Socrates’ death, Plato opened his own school, **the Academy**, where students and professors engaged in a **dialectical approach** to problems.

According to Plato, people should concern themselves primarily with the **search for truth**. Because truth is perfect and eternal, it cannot be found in the world of matter, which is imperfect and constantly changing. Mathematics demonstrates that eternal truths are possible. Such concepts as $2 + 2 = 4$ or that all points of a perfect circle are equidistant from the center are said to have always been true (even before people discovered them), are true, and always will be true. **Mathematics shows that universal truths with which everyone can agree may be found**, but mathematics constitutes only one field of knowledge. Plato believed that we must search for other universal truths in such areas as politics, society, and education; hence, the search for absolute truth should be the quest of the true philosopher.

In ***The Republic***, Plato wrote about the separation of the world of ideas from the world of matter. The world of ideas (or forms) has the Good as its highest point—the source of all true knowledge. The world of matter, the **ever-changing world of sensory data, is not to be trusted**. People need, as much as possible, to free themselves from a concern with matter so that **they can advance toward the Good**. This can be done by transcending matter through the **use of the dialectic** (or critical discussion), in which **one moves from mere opinion to true knowledge**.

The **dialectic** can be described as follows: **All thinking begins with a thesis**, or point of view, such as “War is evil.” This view can be **supported** by pointing out that war causes people to be killed, disrupts families, destroys cities, and has adverse moral effects. As long as **we encounter only people of beliefs like our own, we are not likely to alter our point of view**. When we encounter the antithesis (or opposite point of view) that “War is good,” however, we are forced to **reexamine** and defend our position. Arguments advanced to support the notion that war is good might include the belief that war promotes

bravery, helps eliminate evil political systems, and produces many technical benefits through war-related research. Simply put, the dialectic looks at both sides of an issue. If our antagonists are philosophers who are seriously interested in getting at the truth of the problem of whether war is good or evil, then they will engage in a dialogue in which both advancement and retrenchment—or the giving up of ideas—might occur.

Plato believed that given ample time to argue their positions, the two discussants would come closer to agreement, or synthesis, and therefore closer to truth (which might be that war has good and bad aspects). Those who simply argued to win or who did not maintain a critical perspective could not accomplish this kind of dialectic. For this reason, Plato thought that preparation in the dialectic should involve a lengthy period of education beginning with studies in mathematics. He was particularly critical of inexperienced people who used the dialectic because he believed that students are not mature enough for training in the dialectic until age 30.

Plato saw the dialectic as a vehicle for moving from a concern with the material world to a concern with the world of ideas. Supposedly, the dialectic crosses the “divided line” between matter and idea. The process begins in the world of matter with the use of the brain, the tongue, gestures, and so forth, but it ends in the world of ideas with the discovery of truth. In the “Allegory of the Cave,” Plato depicted prisoners chained in a world of darkness, seeing only shadows on a far cave wall that they take for reality. Imagine one of these prisoners freed from his chains, advancing up a steep slope and into the sunlight, eventually able to see the Sun and realizing it as the true source of heat and light. He would be happy in his true knowledge and wish to contemplate it even more. Yet, remembering his friends in the cave, when he returns to tell them of the real world outside, they choose not to listen to someone who cannot now compete with them in their knowledge of shadows. If he insists on freeing them, they might even kill him.

The meaning of the allegory is this: We ourselves are living in a cave of shadows and illusions, chained by our ignorance and apathy. When we begin to loosen ourselves from our chains, it is the beginning of our education—the steep ascent represents the dialectic that will carry us from the world of matter to the world of ideas—even to a contemplation of the Good as represented by the Sun. Note Plato’s admonition that the person, now a philosopher, who has advanced into the realm of true knowledge must return to the cave to bring enlightenment to others. This points to Plato’s strong belief that not only should philosophizing be an intellectual affair, but also that the philosopher has a duty to share his learning with others, doing this even in the face of adversity or death.

Plato did not think that people create knowledge, but rather that they discover it. In another interesting myth, he conjectured that the human soul once had true knowledge but lost it by being placed in a material body, which distorted and corrupted that knowledge. Thus, people have the arduous task of trying to remember what they once knew. This “Doctrine of Reminiscence” is illustrated by Socrates, who spoke of himself as a midwife who found humans pregnant with knowledge, but knowledge that had not been born or realized. Through his discussions with people, Socrates sought to aid them in giving birth to ideas that in some cases they never knew they had. In the *Meno*, Plato described Socrates’ meeting with a slave boy; through skillful questioning, Socrates shows that the boy knows the Pythagorean Theorem even though he does not know that he knows it.

In *The Republic*, Plato proposed the kind of education that would help bring about a world in which individuals and society are moved as far as they are capable of moving toward the Good. He understood fully that most people do believe in matter as an objective

10 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

reality, that individual differences exist, and that injustice and inhumanity are ways of life. However, he wished to create a world in which outstanding people, such as Socrates, could serve as models and would be rewarded instead of punished. Plato suggested that the state must take an active role in educational concerns and offer a curriculum that leads intelligent students from concrete data toward abstract thinking.

It is interesting to note that Plato thought that girls and boys should be given an equal opportunity to develop themselves to the fullest, but those who showed little ability for abstractions would go into pursuits that would assist in the practical aspects of running a society. Those who demonstrated proficiency in the dialectic would continue their education and become philosophers in positions of power to lead the state toward the highest Good. Plato believed that until philosophers were rulers, states would never pursue the highest ideals of truth and justice.

Plato's idea was that the philosopher-king must be not only a thinker but also a doer. He must supervise the affairs of the state, and like the philosopher who made his way out of the cave and yet returned to teach others, he must see that his wisdom pervades every aspect of state life. Needless to say, such a ruler would have no interest in materialism or even in ruling, but he would rule out of a sense of duty and obligation because he is the most fit to rule. Such a ruler could be male or female, and Plato seriously championed the notion that women should occupy equal positions in the state, including the military. Plato's philosopher-king would be not only a person of wisdom, but also a good person because Plato believed that evil stems more from ignorance than from anything else.

Even though his theories about society have never been fully implemented, Plato did attempt to establish such a society under the patronage of Dionysius II of Syracuse but failed when the tyrant finally realized what Plato was doing. The value of Plato's ideas is that they have stimulated thinking about the meaning and purpose of humanity, society, and education and have even entered into modern thought and practice in many subtle ways. Who would not, for example, want the best person to lead our state, assuming we know what "best" means? Today, as Plato suggested, we provide an educational system with great state involvement that has much to say about what occupation people eventually will pursue as a result of the education they receive. We also recognize the tremendous influence of social class in education, as in Plato's utopian society, which separated people into three classes: workers, military personnel, and rulers.

It is widely believed that philosophizing about the arts in Western culture began with Plato. Plato discussed painting, sculpture, architecture, poetry, dance, and music. Although he saw art as imitation (even imitation of imitation) and not true knowledge, Plato strongly believed that art (including literature) needed to be taught, though regulated and even censored so that it portrayed things in a more virtuous light. In this way, then, art could become a useful part of the educational process.

Plato influenced almost all philosophers who came after him, regardless of whether they supported or rejected his basic ideas. Indeed, there is much merit in the observation by philosopher Alfred North Whitehead that modern philosophy is but a series of footnotes to Plato.



Religious Idealism



Idealism has exerted considerable influence on religion. For example, Judaism and Christianity include many beliefs that fit into idealist thinking. In Judaism and

Christianity, the idea of **one God as pure Spirit and the Universal Good** can be readily recognized as compatible with this philosophy. When Alexander the Great spread Greek culture around the Mediterranean world, there was also a proliferation of Greek schools, which contributed to the spread of **Greek (Hellenistic)** philosophical ideas, including idealism. Many writers of the New Testament were also influenced by Greek culture and philosophy and incorporated ideas of these into their own thinking. **Paul**, who wrote a considerable portion of the New Testament, was born **Saul of Tarsus** when Tarsus was a city heavily influenced by Hellenistic culture and thought; one can find a great deal of idealism in Paul's writings, stemming from both Jewish and Greek traditions. Likewise, **Muhammad and Islamic thought** also reflect Greek ideas with idealistic implications.

AUGUSTINE (354–430) The founders of the **Roman Catholic** Church were heavily influenced by idealism. Aurelius Augustinus Hipponensis was born into, and reared under, the influence of Hellenistic culture. In the ***Confessions***, he described his early life of paganism and the debauchery of his youth until his conversion to Christianity in 386. He became a priest in 391, and in 395 he was appointed Bishop of Hippo. Augustine **connected the philosophy of Platonists and Neoplatonists, like Plotinus, with Christian beliefs**. In ***The City of God***, he described the **City of God and the City of Man** as divisions of the universe parallel to Plato's schemata of the **World of Ideas and the World of Matter**. Like Plato, Augustine believed that the **senses were unreliable and that belief in God rests ultimately on faith**. "We must first believe," he wrote, "in order that we may know." In Plato's philosophy, the soul has knowledge that is obscured by being imprisoned in the body. In Augustine's interpretation, **the soul is blackened by Adam's fall from grace**, which results in human doubt and uncertainty.

Augustine was greatly concerned with the concept of evil and believed that because **man inherited the sin of Adam**, he was engaged in a continuous struggle to regain the kind of purity he had before the Fall. This idea is akin to **Plato's myth about the stars: Souls that lived near the Good were exiled to the world of matter to suffer pain and death and must struggle to return to the spiritual existence they once had**.

Augustine readily accepted Plato's notion of the **"divided line"** between ideas and matter, but he referred to the two worlds as the **World of God and the World of Man**. The World of God is the world of Spirit and the Good; the World of Man is the **material world of darkness, sin, ignorance, and suffering**. Augustine believed that one should, as much as possible, **release oneself from the World of Man and enter into the World of God**. Although no one is able to do this in any final sense until after death, he believed that a person could spiritually transcend this world by concentration on God through **meditation and faith**.

Augustine, like Plato, believed that people **do not create knowledge; God already has created it, and people can discover it through trying to find God**. Because the soul is the closest thing people have to divinity, Augustine believed that we should look **within our souls for the true knowledge** that exists there. He thus promoted an **intuitive approach to education** and agreed with Plato that concentration on physical phenomena could lead us astray from the path of true knowledge. Like Plato, Augustine was a strong **supporter of the dialectical method of learning**, and some written **dialogues** between **Augustine and his son Adeodatus** use the dialectic to facilitate discovering true ideas about God and humanity.

12 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

Augustine's ideas about the nature of the true Christian found more acceptance among those who leaned toward a monastic conception of Christianity. Such monastics believed that the Christian should cut himself or herself off from worldly concerns and meditate. Augustine agreed with Plato in his reservations about the arts. He thought that too much of an interest in earthly things could endanger the soul. He even questioned the use of church music because it might deflect one from concentrating on the true meaning of the Mass.

Augustine patterned his educational philosophy after the Platonic tradition. He believed that worldly knowledge gained through the senses was full of error but that reason could lead toward understanding, and he held that, ultimately, it was necessary to transcend reason through faith. Such questions as the Trinity, for example—three gods in one—could not be fully understood by reason and needed to be accepted on faith. Only through reason supplemented by faith could one enter the realm of true ideas.

Augustine believed that the kind of knowledge to be accepted on faith should be determined by the Church. The Church should determine not only unquestioned beliefs (such as the idea of the Trinity), but also the proper kind of education. Augustine did not believe that the right kind of learning is easy. The child, an offspring of Adam, is prone to sin, and his or her evil nature must be kept under control in order to develop the good that is deep inside; thus, one's studies should concentrate on an acceptance of the Church's truths.

One question that Augustine pondered in *De Magistro* was "Can one man teach another?" He believed that one cannot teach another in the traditional sense, but can direct the learner with words or other symbols or "signs." Learning must come from within, and all true knowledge ultimately comes from God. Augustine was the greatest of the Christian Platonists, and his stress on the role of the learner's spontaneous and God-directed intelligence had great implications for Christian education for many centuries.

It is not surprising that idealism and religion have been closely intertwined. Christianity, in particular, promotes the idea of God as transcendent and pure Spirit or Idea. In addition, Christians hold that God created the world out of Himself or out of Spirit or Idea. This resembles the Platonic concept that true reality is, after all, basically a nonmaterial thing, that is, Idea.

It is not surprising that religious idealism exerted tremendous influence on education and schooling. Early Christians were quick to realize that Christianity would fare better if its adherents were given some kind of systematic teaching about religious ideas. When they established schools, they established them in patterns with which they were familiar. Thus, many Jewish and Greek ideas about the nature of humanity, society, and God went into the Christian schools along with distinctly Christian ideas. For centuries, the Church was the creator and protector of schooling, and the generations educated in those schools were taught from the idealist point of view.

The mutuality of idealism and Judeo-Christian tradition was brought together in a unity of European culture by the Middle Ages and afterward. This helps explain several characteristics of modern thought. To Plato, ultimate reality is Idea and our bridge to it is the mind. To those who follow in the Judeo-Christian tradition, ultimate reality is God and our bridge to it is the soul. It seemed a logical step to connect Idea and God on the one hand, and mind and soul on the other. Thus, humanity's contact with ultimate reality is by means of mind and soul (or their congeners: self, consciousness, and subjectivity).

DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN IDEALISM

By the beginning of the modern period in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, idealism had come to be largely identified with systematization and subjectivism. This identification was encouraged by the writings of René Descartes, George Berkeley, Immanuel Kant, Georg W. F. Hegel, and Josiah Royce.

RENÉ DESCARTES (1596–1650) Born in the small town of La Haze, France, René Descartes was educated by the Jesuits, who he admired for their devoted work toward teaching, but for whom he developed great dissatisfaction because of their doctrinaire ideas. Although his philosophical thinking challenged Catholic doctrine on many points, it seems that he remained sincere in his Catholicism.

It is difficult and misleading to classify such an original thinker as Descartes into one philosophical school. Certainly, much of his philosophy can be characterized as idealism, but he also contributed much to philosophical realism and other thought systems. For current purposes, the significant works of Descartes to be considered are his celebrated *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

Principally in *Discourse*, Descartes explored his “methodical doubt,” whereby he sought to doubt all things, including his own existence. He was searching for ideas that are indubitable, and he thought that if he could discover ideas that are “clear and distinct,” then he would have a solid foundation upon which to build other true ideas. He found that he could throw all things into doubt except one—that he himself was doubting or thinking. Although he could doubt that he was doubting, Descartes still could not doubt that he was thinking. In this manner, he arrived at the famous Cartesian first principle: *Cogito, ergo sum*, “I think, therefore I am.”

The Cartesian *cogito* has stimulated much philosophical thought since Descartes’ time. Traces of it can be found in many modern philosophies. The *cogito* supports the tradition of idealism because it reaffirms the centrality of mind in the relationship of the human being with the world.

Descartes realized that even though the *cogito* was indubitable, he could not move easily from that stage to other indubitables. Objects outside the *cogito* are grasped by the senses, and the senses are notoriously subject to error. Furthermore, any particular idea or thought depends on other ideas. One cannot think of a triangle, for example, without considering angles, degrees, lines, and so forth. Thus, Descartes encountered the necessity of one idea referring to another. He wanted to arrive at the idea at which further reference stopped. He found it impossible to arrive at any idea—even the indubitable *cogito*—that did not refer to something other than itself, except for the idea of Perfect Being. Descartes thought that he had, by arriving at Perfect Being, encountered God, the infinite and timeless Creator, the source of all things. However, some critics have pointed out that proving that one is thinking does not in any way prove the ideas one is thinking about.

Descartes arrived at the two principles on which he based his system: the *cogito* and the Deity. He had the indubitability of human thought in the *cogito* and the foundation for all the objects of thought in the Deity. From these principles, he proceeded to build a philosophy that has, in one way or another, influenced all philosophy since. That some of these principles are within the tradition of idealism can be readily seen: Finite mind contemplates objects of thought founded in God (in Platonic terms, human mind contemplates the ultimate reality of ideas). For Descartes, the way he arrived at his principles—


14 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

his method of analysis—brought **new life** to philosophy. **The Cartesian method** was extended into numerous fields of inquiry, including the natural sciences.

GEORGE BERKELEY (1685–1753) George Berkeley was born and educated in **Ireland** and spent most of his professional life as a minister in the Episcopal Church there. While still a young man, he developed most of his innovative ideas, writing several **treatises on philosophy**, including *Principles of Human Knowledge*. Berkeley contended that **all existence depends on some mind to know** it; if no minds exist, then for all intents and purposes nothing exists unless it is perceived by the **mind of God**. Berkeley was **attacking** a central tenet of philosophical realism—that a **material world exists independent of mind**.

According to the scientist Isaac **Newton**, the universe is composed of material bodies moving in space and controlled by mathematical laws, such as the law of gravity. Berkeley held that no one has experienced such matter firsthand and, further, that such a **theory is a conception of mind**. Berkeley thought that people made a common error in assuming that such objects as trees, houses, and dogs exist where there is no mind to perceive them. Instead, to say that a thing exists means that it is perceived by some mind—*esse est percipi* (**to be is to be perceived**). To the classic question “Does a tree falling in the middle of a forest make a sound if no one is around to hear it?” Berkeley would answer “No, if we rule out the idea of it being perceived by God.” There is **no existence without perception**, but **things might exist in the sense that they are perceived by a Supreme Being**.

Berkeley’s philosophical views were strongly **conditioned by his religious** views. He held that immaterial substance (ideas or spirit) has been **profaned by science** and that **science has brought on “the monstrous systems of atheists.”** What exists or has being is not matter: It is **Spirit, Idea, or God**. Berkeley’s efforts can be viewed as a kind of last-ditch stand **against the encroachments of science** and scientific realism that hold to the materialistic thesis.

Berkeley refuted matter by showing that **matter cannot exist except as a form of mind**. We can **know things only as we consciously conceive them**, and when we think of the universe existing before finite minds can conceive it, we are led to assume the existence of an Omnipresent Mind lasting through all time and eternity. Thus, we might say that although people may not be conscious of trees falling throughout eternity, God is. Berkeley was a champion of ideal realities and values whose main purpose is to make evident the **existence of God and to prove that God is the true cause of all things**. 


DAVID HUME (1711–1776) The **Scottish**-born philosopher David Hume proved to be the greatest **antagonist** to the ideas of **Berkeley**. Hume was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, studied law, and later served in **France** as a member of the English embassy. His writings were not widely received at their inception and, according to his own account, “fell dead-born from the press.” His major work, *Treatise upon Human Nature*, written when he was only **26**, is one of the **strongest attacks on idealism ever written**. Although Hume began with an acceptance of the Berkeleian principle *esse est percipi*, he concluded that if all we can know are our own impressions and ideas, then we have **no genuine basis for asserting the reality of either material or spiritual substances**. To connect one occurrence with another, Hume pointed out, is merely the habit of expecting one event to follow another on the basis of an indefinite series of such happenings. All we can know is that we have ideas and impressions, one following another in a kind of **chaotic heap**.

Whereas Berkeley believed that his philosophy had dealt adequately with atheism, Hume believed that **no more justification could be found for the existence of a deity** than for the existence of matter. Thus, just as Berkeley thought that he had destroyed atheism and materialism, so Hume believed that he also **had destroyed the concept of mind and God**. Hume recognized that his theories **resulted in a kind of skepticism** that affected **religion and science**, but he was **unable to reconcile the paradox of a seemingly sensible world with the logic of human thought**.

Today, in our materialist culture, Berkeley's ideas might seem out of place, but the concepts he developed have influenced scholars in many fields. His notion of the **centrality of the subjective mind** and of the existence of anything being dependent on a perceiving mind has helped influence scholars to study further the nature of perception and the objects of thought.

IMMANUEL KANT (1724–1804) The **German** philosopher Immanuel Kant was born in humble conditions, the son of a saddler. Educated in schools of his hometown, **Königsberg**, he eventually became perhaps the most famous professor the University of Königsberg ever had, and Kant is recognized as one of the world's great philosophers. Although he never traveled outside of Königsberg his entire life, his knowledge of the world at that time was vast, and he was well acquainted with contemporary philosophical ideas.

Among other things, Kant's work was **a critique of past systems** in which he sought to pull off a **"Copernican revolution"** in the field of philosophy. Two important works that he produced in this effort were ***Critique of Pure Reason*** and ***Critique of Practical Reason***, in which he sought to **bring order** to the divergent and warring philosophical camps of **rationalism and empiricism**.

Rationalists sought universal truths or ideas by which a coherent system and structure of knowledge could be deduced. They **distrusted sense perception** because its results are so **individualized and erratic**. The empiricists, in contrast, held to the **immediate perceptions of experience**  because these are practical and connected with everyday life.

Kant saw that the **clash** between these divergent philosophical views were getting nowhere. He accepted the validity and reliability of modern science and believed that the constant bickering between the two positions was doing nothing to further the development of a compatible view of knowledge.

Kant's **idealism** comes from his concentration **on human thought processes**. The **rationalist**, he held, **thinks analytically**, whereas the **empiricist** thinks **synthetically**. He worked out a system based on ***a posteriori*** (synthetic) and ***a priori*** (analytic) logical judgments that he called ***synthetic a priori*** judgments in order to reach a rapprochement with science and philosophy. He thought that he had arrived at a new system whereby we could have valid knowledge of human experience established on the scientific laws of nature as well as achieve philosophical clarity. In short, we would have the best of rationalist and empiricist insights gathered together in a **unified system**. This would give science the underpinnings it needed, because Kant understood that **science needed an empirical approach** in order to discover universal laws of nature. However, he also **recognized the importance of the human self or mind** and its thought processes as a prime organizing agent in accomplishing this goal.

Kant had to face the problem of the thinking subject and the object of thought. He **rejected** Berkeley's position that **things are totally dependent on mind** because this notion would **reject** the possibility **of scientific law**. He also was caught up by the problem

16 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

of how subjective mind could know objective reality, and concluded that nature, or objective reality, is a causal continuum—a world connected in space and time with its own internal order. Subjective mind cannot perceive this order in itself or in totality because when subjective mind is conscious of something, it is not the thing-in-itself. Mind is only conscious of the experience (the *phenomenon*, the aspect of the thing-in-itself). The thing-in-itself Kant called the *noumenon*. Each experience (phenomenon) of a thing is one small, additional piece of knowledge about the total thing (noumenon). Thus, all we know is the content of experience. When we go beyond this, we have entered into the rationalist argument and into speculation on the ultimate or noumenal reality of things-in-themselves.

Many of Kant's efforts were directed toward refuting the skepticism of Hume because Kant wanted to show that real knowledge is possible. His efforts to do this were clouded by the challenging way he united apparently opposing themes, such as phenomenon and noumenon, the practical and the pure, and subjectivity and objectivity. The two *Critiques* illustrate this conflict because one speaks to the logic of thought and the other to its practical applications. In *Critique of Pure Reason*, the result ends up close to Hume's skepticism because Kant found it impossible to make absolutely universal and necessary judgments about human experience purely on rational and scientific grounds.

In his *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant switched gears and went to the practical side—to moral and ethical dimensions—where he thought universal judgments could and should be made. Thus, his moral or practical philosophy consists of moral laws that he held to be universally valid—laws that he called “categorical imperatives”—such as “Act always so that you can will the maxim or the determining principle of your action to become a universal law.”

This line of thinking permeates Kant's writings on education, a matter he considered of primary moral concern. He held that “the greatest and most difficult problem to which man can devote himself is the problem of education.” Another categorical imperative that he established in his moral philosophy was to treat each person as an end and never as a mere means. This imperative has greatly influenced subsequent thought about the importance of character development in education, and most of Kant's educational statements are maxims derived from his categorical imperatives. He held that humans are the only beings who need education and that discipline is a primary ingredient of education that leads people to think and seek out “the good.” Children should be educated not simply for the present but also for the possibility of an improved future condition, which Kant called the “idea of humanity and the whole destiny of mankind.” For the most part, he thought that education should consist of discipline, culture, discretion, and moral training. To Kant, the essence of education should not be simply training; the important thing was enlightenment, or teaching a child to think according to principles as opposed to mere random behavior. This is associated closely with his notion of will, and the education of will means living according to the duties flowing from the categorical imperatives. In fact, Kant thought that an important part of a child's education was the performance of duties toward oneself and others.

We can readily see Kant's idealism in his concentration on thought processes and the nature of the relationship between mind and its objects on the one hand and universal moral ideals on the other. Even though his attempts to bring about a “Copernican revolution” in philosophy failed, his systematic thought has greatly influenced all subsequent Western philosophy, idealistic and otherwise.



GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL (1770–1831) Georg Hegel's thought is perhaps the capstone of idealistic philosophy in the modern era. He was born in Stuttgart, Germany, and led a rather normal and uneventful life as a youth, receiving his education until the age of 18 in his native city. He then went to the University of Tübingen and majored in theology, graduating in 1793. He showed no particular promise as a budding philosopher, according to his professors, and for the next several years he worked as a tutor with little economic success. He continued to study, and after he received a small inheritance from his father, his efforts became more successful. For a while, he was a lecturer at the University of Jena and then rector of a secondary school until 1816. He was a professor at the University of Heidelberg for two years and in 1818 became a professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin, remaining there until his death.

Although practically all of his major works were written before he went to Berlin, there he became a prominent and overriding figure in philosophy. One can find elements of his thought in such disparate subsequent philosophies as Marxism, existentialism, and pragmatism. In examining Hegel, one must look at three major aspects of his system: logic, nature, and spirit. Three of his important books are *Phenomenology of Mind*, *Logic*, and *Philosophy of Right*.

One striking characteristic of Hegel's philosophy is his logic. He thought he had developed a perfect logical system that corrected the inadequacies of Aristotelian logic. The word *dialectic* best fits Hegel's logic, and it often has been portrayed as a rather mechanical warring between thesis and antithesis, with the result being a synthesis. Yet, his logic was not quite that inflexible because it included many variations and shadings of the triadic categories: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Even more to the point, Hegel conceived of thought as a continuum, not as a series of mechanical synthetic unions. It could be said that the continuum is characterized by a moving, constant "synthesizing"—a moving, growing, ever-changing thought process.

Hegel maintained that his logical system, if applied rigorously and accurately, would arrive at Absolute Idea. This is similar to Plato's notion of unchanging ideas. The difference is that Hegel was sensitive to change. Change, development, and movement are all central and necessary in Hegel's logic. Even Absolute Idea is the final stage only as it concerns thought process because Absolute Ideas have their own antithesis—Nature.

o Hegel, Nature is the "otherness" of Idea—its opposite. He did not view Idea and Nature as absolutely separate, a dualism at which Descartes arrived, because to Hegel, dualisms are intolerable as a final stage. In holding this view, Hegel was not denying the ordinary facts, stones, and sticks of everyday life; rather, these are a lower order of reality and not the final synthesis.

The final stage or synthesis of Idea and Nature is Spirit, and this is where the final Absolute is encountered. Absolute Spirit is manifested by the historical development of a people and by the finest works of art, religion, and philosophy. Yet, these manifestations are not Absolute Spirit; they are only its manifestations. Hegel did not think that this final and perfect end had been reached, but he did think that there was a final end toward which humans move, however slowly and tortuously, and however many backslides we might make. In this view, Hegel's idealism is most apparent—the search for final Absolute Spirit.

One major feature of the Hegelian system is movement toward richer, more complex, and more complete syntheses. To Hegel, history showed this movement just as much as logical thought processes did. It is as if the entire universe, in Hegel's view, is

18 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

moving toward completion and wholeness. Thus, in Hegel's system, if we examine any one thing, then we are always referred to something else connected with it. Such was the case with the development of civilization; that is, history moved in a dialectical, rational process. Those who are familiar with the thought of Karl Marx will note similarities with Hegel because Marx was much indebted to him.

Hegel's thought no longer holds the preeminent position it once held. One reason is that his system led to a glorification of the community or state at the expense of the individual. It also led some of his followers to believe in a mystical, foreordained destiny in the face of which individuals are powerless. In this view, individuals are mere parts or aspects of the greater, more complete, and unified whole—a grand design—leading toward an unknown conclusion.

Hegel has had considerable influence on the philosophy as well as the theory of education. Ivan Soll has attempted to show some of Hegel's contributions to philosophy of education—contributions that must be viewed against the grand manner in which Hegel saw philosophical problems. Hegel seemed to think that to be truly educated, an individual must pass through the various stages of the cultural evolution of humankind. This idea is not as preposterous as it might seem at first glance because he held that individuals benefit from all that has gone before them. This idea can be illustrated by referring to the development of science and technology. To a person who lived 300 years ago, electricity was unknown except as a natural occurrence, as in lightning. Today, practically everyone depends on electric power for everyday use and has a working, practical knowledge of it that is entirely outside the experience of a person from the past. A contemporary person can easily learn elementary facts about electricity in a relatively short time; that is, he or she can “pass through” or learn an extremely important phase of our cultural evolution simply due to a passing of time. Thus, when Hegel said that “The owl of Minerva spreads its wings with the falling of dusk,” he was pointing out that our understanding of history is part of the developmental logic and is essentially retroactive and provides an understanding of a stage of reality only as it has occurred.

Hegel thought that it was possible (if not always probable in every case) for at least some individuals to know everything essential in the history of humanity's collective consciousness. Today, because of the knowledge explosion, encouraged by Google and other information-retrieval systems, as well as the increasing complexity and extent of human knowledge, such an encompassing educational ideal seems naive. Yet, Hegel's position retains some credibility because of the need to pass on our cultural heritage, to assess a complete understanding of all past knowledge, and to continue to develop an understanding of people's paths to the present. Even to Hegel, however, the attainment of such a universal and encyclopedic knowledge was mostly an ideal aim, possible only to elite scholars.

JOSIAH ROYCE (1855–1916) One of the most influential American exponents of Hegelian idealism at the beginning of the twentieth century was Josiah Royce. Royce maintained that the external meaning of a thing depends entirely on its internal meaning—that is, its “embodiment of purpose.” He argued that embodiment of purpose is the criterion of “mentality” and that the internal essence of anything is mental. Royce, like most idealists, believed his philosophical views corresponded closely with religious teachings (the Christian religion in his case), and he spent much effort demonstrating their compatibility.

Royce believed that ideas are essentially purposes or plans of action and that the fulfillment of ideas is found when they are put into action. Thus, purposes are incomplete without an external world in which they are realized, and the external world is meaningless unless it is the fulfillment of such purposes. Whose purposes are fulfilled? Royce answered in Hegelian terms that it is the Absolute's purposes, and he believed that one of the most important things for a person to develop is a sense of loyalty to moral principles and causes. This implies a spiritual overtone in which one achieves the highest good by becoming a part of the universal design. The influence of this kind of thinking is evident in the educational enterprise in terms of teaching people not only about the purposes of life but also about how they can become active participants in such purposes.

Following Kant and Hegel, interest in idealism continued in several countries, and German idealism influenced an important movement in England, seen in the writings of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Carlyle, and Ruskin. The English school of idealism included such philosophers as Thomas Hill Green (whose writings included suggestions for ethical, political, and economic reforms) and Francis Herbert Bradley (who argued strongly against empiricism, utilitarianism, and naturalism).

In the United States (in addition to the work of Royce), transcendental philosophies (including the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson) also reflected the views of idealist philosophy. William Torrey Harris was another American who was both philosopher and educator and who promoted idealism. He later became the director of the Concord School of Philosophy, where he was active in an attempt to merge New England transcendentalism with Hegelian idealism. He founded the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* in 1867 and had a great influence in educational matters. He served as Superintendent of Schools in St. Louis, Missouri, from 1857 to 1880 and was U.S. Commissioner of Education from 1889 to 1906. He provided many ideas for reforming public education and is considered one of the founders of the public school system in the United States.

IDEALISM AS A PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

In general, idealists have shown a great concern for education, and many have written extensively about it. Plato made education the core of his utopian state in *The Republic*, and Augustine also gave extensive attention to the need for Christians to become aware of the importance of education. Kant and Hegel wrote about education or referred to it a great deal in their writings, and both made their living as teachers. More recent idealists such as A. Bronson Alcott, William Torrey Harris, Herman Horne, William Hocking, Giovanni Gentile, and J. Donald Butler have tried systematically to apply idealist principles to the theory and practice of education.

Perhaps one of the most notable idealist educators in the nineteenth century was Bronson Alcott. An American transcendentalist whose ideas were a mixture of the philosophies of Plato, Plotinus, Kant, Hegel, Carlyle, and Emerson, he frequently contributed writings to the transcendentalist periodical *The Dial*. Alcott expounded a kind of absolute idealism with the belief that only the spiritual is real and material things are illusions of the senses. He was interested in the education of the young and opened a school at the Masonic Temple in Boston in 1834 that became known as the Temple School. Alcott was actively involved in the school, where his daughter, Louisa May Alcott, who became a well-known writer, was a student. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he advocated feminism, denounced slavery, and believed in the innate goodness of people. He chose

20 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

biblical selections espousing childhood innocence for lessons and used a conversational method of teaching that encouraged children to discuss moral problems openly. He published his *Conversations with Children on the Gospels* as a way to introduce children to sacred literature. Alcott put great weight on the intuitive knowledge of children and believed that the most important goal in education was character building. His assistant at the Temple School was Elizabeth P. Peabody, who in 1860 opened in Boston one of the first kindergartens in America based strongly on the ideas of Alcott and Friedrich Froebel.

In 1843 Bronson Alcott and Charles Lane founded a communal organization in Harvard, Massachusetts, called Fruitlands. It was an attempt to live simple and self-reliant lives, and the group engaged in “Socratic conversations.” Alcott later formed the Concord School of Philosophy, which drew its inspiration from Plato’s Academy. During the Civil War, Alcott also served as Superintendent of Schools in Concord. He exerted great influence on a number of people, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Torrey Harris. Harris credited Alcott with turning his philosophical beliefs toward idealistic channels.

Aims of Education

Idealists generally agree that education should not only stress development of the mind but also encourage students to focus on all things of lasting value. Along with Plato, they believe that the aim of education should be directed toward the search for true ideas. Another important idealist aim is character development because the search for truth demands personal discipline and steadfast character. This aim is prevalent in the writings of Kant, Harris, Horne, Gentile, and others. What they want in society is not just the literate, knowledgeable person, but the good person as well.

Idealists always have stressed the importance of mind over matter. Some idealists, such as Berkeley, reject the idea that matter exists by itself, whereas others, like Augustine, take the position that matter might exist, but in a generally detrimental way. Platonic idealists maintain that a proper education should include examining such areas as art and science, which, in turn, could lead the student to the more speculative and abstract subjects of mathematics and philosophy. In any event, idealists place less stress on physical and material studies than they do on studies that are nonphysical, abstract, and universal. The important thing for the idealist is to arrive at truth, and truth cannot be ever-shifting. Some idealists, although not adhering strictly to the Platonic idea that truth is eternal and perfect, do believe that truth is substantial and relatively permanent. Thus, for such idealists there might be many truths, even conflicting ones, but they are truths of a more lasting nature; consequently, many idealists favor studies in religion and the classics—two areas that contain enduring ideas.

Augustine, a Neoplatonist, agreed with Plato that the highest aim is a search for the truth, but he believed even more strongly than Plato that truth has overwhelming spiritual implications. According to Augustine, the search for truth is a search for God, and a true education leads one to God. Because God is pure idea, God can be reached only through contemplation of ideas; therefore, a true education is concerned with ideas rather than matter.

Other idealists have maintained that there might be levels of truth. Kant, for example, explored the truths of both pure reason and practical reason, and Hegel thought that truth is something in development, moving from simple to richer and more complex ideas. This is why many idealists believe it is not truth *per se* that is important, but the

search for truth. Even Socrates seemed to imply this position by stating that all ideas are open to challenge; a literal translation of the term *philosopher* is not simply a discoverer of truth but a lover of it—by implication, a seeker of truth.

Some modern educators who share many things with idealist philosophy have compiled lists of great books they like that contain points of view as disparate as the Bible, Marx's *Das Kapital*, Augustine's *Confessions*, and Voltaire's *Candide*. This idea is also found in classical realism, and the point behind using such books is not that any or all of them contain the final truth, but rather that they contain some of the best and most-lasting ideas conceived by humanity. Most noticeable (even with the books on science), is that they extol thinking and ideas rather than mere sense data and concentrate on great concerns rather than on mere particulars. One book often found on such lists is Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. Readers would go awry if they found the book to be just a sea story or believed that it concentrated only on things like the kinds of ships used or the numbers of whales killed. *Moby Dick* is a work containing great ideas about justice, malevolence, and courage—concepts that one needs to ponder. The aim is not to see this or any other book as a literal rendering of events but to see it as something that provides insight into ourselves and the universe. Thus, the value of any major work in art or science lies in its carrying us to a higher point in our thinking, and we should use literature and art, in particular, as vehicles for moving us not only into the world of ideas, but also into the realm of great ideas—ideas that are of substantial value to us in understanding truth.

Idealists conceive of people as thinking beings who have minds capable of seeking truth through reasoning. They see people as beings who breathe, eat, and sleep, but above all as thinking beings whose thoughts can range from the ridiculous to the sublime. For example, Plato believed that the lowest kind of thinking should be called mere opinion. On this level, people's ideas are not well thought out and are usually contradictory. However, people can aspire to wisdom, meaning that they can improve the way they think and the quality of their ideas and can obtain ideas that are of substantial value and endurance, if not perfect and eternal. People can also come closer to the ideal goal of wisdom and truth by using the thinking and writings of others. The important point is to direct our thinking toward more universal concepts than those employed in the perfunctory matters of day-to-day living. Reading the daily newspaper or looking at the Internet, for example, might be useful for learning what is happening in the world, but the newspaper or the Internet does not generally assist us in understanding why something is happening. This understanding demands not only thought on our part, but also the ability to relate the thinking of others to a critical understanding of important problems and issues in our lives.

Some have contended that the Bible, *Moby Dick*, and *The Republic* do not speak to our current concerns about pollution, weapons of mass destruction, and racial bigotry. The idealist would reply that although individuals might not find specific answers to every particular problem in such works, they can find issues dealt with in a general way that is conducive to an understanding of specific problems and to their solutions. The Bible, for example, deals with the problems of war and bigotry, and *Das Kapital* speaks at length about many economic problems that are still significant. Our failure to deal adequately with our current problems derives not from a lack of facts or ideas but from a failure to understand things from the vantage point of great and encompassing ideas.

The idealist emphasis on ideas and the mental and spiritual qualities of human beings has led many idealist philosophers to put great emphasis on individuals in terms of

22 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

their intellectual development in various educational settings. Their subjectivist orientation to learning as opposed to a more objective one is held by many to be one of idealism's most important contributions.

J. Donald Butler, a twentieth-century educator, held that the concern for the individual is one primary characteristic that makes idealism still viable for a modern audience. His analysis of the problem, in *Idealism in Education*, indicates that self lies at the center of idealist metaphysics and (we may conclude) at the center of idealist education. Accordingly, he finds that the self is the prime reality of individual experience; that ultimate reality can be conceived as a self; and that it might be one self, a community of selves, or a Universal Self. Hence, education becomes primarily concerned with self-realization. Butler quotes Gentile as saying that self-realization should be the ultimate aim of education.

Such a theme has its roots deeply embedded in the idealist tradition. Descartes placed the thinking self at the base of his metaphysical schema and his methodological search with his famous *cogito*: "I think, therefore I am." Some scholars date modern subjectivism from this development. Such thinkers as Berkeley further developed the notion of subjective reality, which led to solipsism on the one hand and skepticism on the other. Berkeley's notion that things do not even exist unless perceived by the subjective individual mind or the mind of God gave impetus to the subjectivist trend of idealist educational thought. Because thinking and knowing are so central in educational concerns, it is little wonder that idealism has exerted so much influence on educational views about individual mind and self.

Even though subjectivism is a major wing of idealism, we must not forget another, equally powerful idealist notion—the relationship of the part to the whole or the symbiotic relationship of the self to society. Plato could not even conceive of the individual apart from a specific place and role in society. This same theme, though enunciated differently, can be seen in Augustine's view of the connection of a finite human to an infinite God. In the modern era, this theme was perhaps most fully developed by Hegel. He held that the individual must be related to the whole because only in the setting of the total relationship can the real significance of a single individual be found. This led Hegel to assert that individuals find their true meaning in being in a society, in serving the community or the state, a statement that is close to Plato's idea. Hegel would even go so far as to say that one must relate oneself to the totality of existence, the cosmos, in order to gain a true understanding of oneself.

The impact of these ideas on education is readily apparent in the writings of Horne, Gentile, and Harris, all of whom have influenced modern education. Horne, an American idealist in the early twentieth century, maintained that education is an account of people finding themselves as an integral part of a universe of mind. The learner is a finite personality growing into the likeness of an infinite ideal. Because of the learner's immaturity, the teacher's role is to guide the learner along the correct paths toward the infinite. This calls for the teacher to be a well-informed person and one who has the knowledge and personal qualities necessary to accomplish this feat. The education of willpower becomes central here because it is easy for the learner to be lured away from the desired path by the siren calls of corruption and untruth, a problem often discussed by Augustine and other religious thinkers. For Horne, education should encourage the "will to perfection" for the student and is an activity whereby one shapes oneself into the likeness of God—a task that requires eternal life for its fulfillment.

Giovanni Gentile (1875–1944) was an Italian idealist who thought that the individual is not only a part of a community of minds but is also connected with the mind of God; hence, all education is religious education. Gentile maintained that one primary function of education is to open the soul to God. Following this lead, Harris proposed that education should lead people to what he called “a third level of enlightenment.” This involves the individual becoming aware of the spiritual nature of all things, including union with God and personal immortality. The influence of Hegel’s thought is prominent in Harris’ educational philosophy, particularly where he recommends taking the student up through insight into the personal nature of the Absolute. For Harris, human development and education are series of dialectical experiences.

Many believe that the humanistic psychology of Abraham H. Maslow (1908–1970) reflects an idealistic philosophical position because of its emphasis on self-realization. Maslow was an American psychologist who, in the beginning, was influenced by Freudian and behaviorist beliefs. He broke from these beliefs and emphasized freedom and humanity’s capacity for self-actualization. Maslow believed that human nature consists of a hierarchy of needs that are genetic in origin. The most basic needs are for air, water, shelter, sleep, and sex. Next are safety and security. As people become more secure, they seek love and belongingness, self-esteem, and esteem from others. Above these needs is a need for truth, order, justice, and beauty. Healthy individuals, according to Maslow, seek to move up the ladder of needs in order to achieve their full potential. Although self-realization is a central aim of idealist education, this does not mean that the self is realized in isolation. Idealists believe that the individual self is only a part and can have meaning only in a larger context.

Many idealists are also concerned with moral character as an outgrowth of thinking and thoughtful actions. The movement toward wisdom itself, the idealist would argue, results from a kind of moral conviction. Augustine thought of God as the highest wisdom and the movement toward wisdom (or God) as the highest moral principle. This concept probably is expressed best by Hegel, who described the dialectic as a movement going from the simple to the complex in terms of Spirit trying to understand itself. Although Hegel did not believe in the transcendent God of Christianity, he did accept a God of Absolute Spirit (*Geist*), that history is the process of *Geist* coming to know itself, and that we are all a part of God (*Geist*). Hegel believed that the individual can know God, and he argued against theologians who said that God is unknowable. According to Hegel, humans achieve their fullest stature when they understand the movement toward wisdom or God and fully participate in it.

One of the more prominent advocates of character development as a proper aim of education was Kant. He made reason, not God, the source of moral law; consequently, the only thing morally valuable is a good will. People who have a good will know what their duty is and conscientiously seek to do that duty. Kant promoted what he called a “categorical imperative”; that is, one should never act in any manner other than how one would have all other people act. The proper function of education, then, is to educate people to know and do their duty in ways that respect this imperative. This will be, basically, character education, and idealists generally agree, as Butler has pointed out, that any education worthy of the name is character education. The education of character includes not only a sense of duty but also the development of willpower and loyalty.

Horne emphasized the education of the will. By this, he meant that students should be educated to resist temptations and to apply themselves to useful tasks. The

24 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

education of the will involves effort because, Horne believed, education is directly proportional to the effort expended. Whereas some educators maintain that children should follow only their interests, Horne held that the development of willpower enables a child to do things that might not be particularly interesting but are extremely valuable. Even though a person might not be highly intelligent, Horne maintained, effort would enable the person to achieve far beyond the point to which mere interest would have taken him or her.

Such idealists as Gentile, who supported the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini, emphasized the development of loyalty as an important aspect of character education. Along with Hegel, Gentile thought that the destiny of the individual is tied to the destiny of society or government and that, consequently, it is necessary for the individual to have a strong sense of loyalty to the state. Proper character education would thus develop the attribute of loyalty because an individual without loyalty would be incomplete. When the teacher acts according to the interests of the state or society, the true interests of the student are being met. By the same token, a student's proper role is to abide by the authority of the teacher.



Methods and Curriculum

Most idealists who look at our schools today are dismayed at what they find. They see students regimented into studying facts, later becoming specialists of some kind, and using those specialties with little humane concern for their fellow human beings. Modern students seem like robots surveying bits and scraps of everything, thereby obtaining an “education” with little depth, operating on the basis of rules, or “facts,” rather than on knowledge, wisdom, or inner conviction.

Idealists lean toward studies that provide depth, and they would strongly suggest a modification of the view that things should be studied simply because they are new or meet occupational needs. Idealists find that much of the great literature of the past has more pertinence to contemporary problems than what is considered new and relevant. Almost any contemporary problem, idealists would argue, has its roots in the past. Such problems as the relationship of the individual to society have been debated extensively and written about by great philosophers and thinkers since the beginning of thought. To ignore what great minds of the past have to say about life and society is to ignore the most relevant writings and thinking the world has produced.

Idealists do not favor specialized learning as much as learning that is holistic. They ask us to see the whole rather than a disjointed collection of parts, and they believe that a holistic approach leads to a more liberal and scholarly attitude toward learning. Although such subjects as the natural sciences are useful, they are of maximum value only when they help us to see the whole picture.

Plato believed that the best method of learning was the dialectic. Through this critical method of thinking, he believed, the individual could see things *en toto*. In *The Republic*, which is essentially the fruit of dialectical thinking, he attempted to do this and to integrate a wide range of learning into a meaningful whole, which would achieve synthesis and provide us with universal concepts. This method of the dielectic can be learned, but it requires a critical attitude, a background in mathematics, and extended study. The dialectic is a winnowing-out process in which ideas are put into battle against each other, with the more substantive ideas enduring the fray.

Although this method is not often used in schools today, the dialectic was widely used as an educational technique throughout the Middle Ages. Ideas were to be placed in the arena of battle; only if they emerged victorious would there be some reason for believing in them. Churchmen, such as Peter Abelard, used the dialectic in vindicating the truths of Christian doctrine, and Abelard's famous *Sic et Non* was a way of looking at both sides of the question and allowing the truth to emerge.

In addition to dialectical method, some idealists maintain that truth also is received through intuition and revelation. Augustine practiced the dialectic, but he also put great stress on an intuitive approach to knowledge. His argument was that God, the Inner Light of human beings, could speak to us if we made ourselves receptive. Augustine believed that we should reject materialistic concerns as much as possible so that we could attune ourselves with God. Even religious music, he felt, could be disconcerting. One finds Augustine's approach widely used in today's monasteries or in other contemplative religious orders, where even talking may not be allowed.

Even outside strictly religious schools, most idealists advocate a conceptual method that includes both the dialectic and the intuitive approach to learning. Plato held that one does not learn as much from nature as from dialogues with other people, and Augustine believed that although one may be blind and deaf, incapable of any perception through the senses, one still can learn all the important truths and reach God.

Many modern idealists also champion the idea of learning through the dialectic or contemplation, but these methods are not as widely applied as they once were. Today, some idealists lean more toward the study of ideas through the use of classical works or writings and art that express great ideas. Idealists do believe, however, that any study of Great Books should be undertaken with experienced leadership and with an emphasis on the comprehension of ideas rather than on the mere memorization and classification of information. They insist on a seminar type of instruction with opportunity for ample dialogue between teacher and student. Furthermore, idealists attracted to such an approach emphasize those ideas that have perennial value—that is, ideas that have withstood the test of time across the centuries.

Although one might easily see how this idealist approach can be applied to college-level education, it might not be so apparent how it could be used in elementary and secondary schools; however, idealists are insistent that it can be. To begin with, one must be clear on the purpose of learning. The idealist is not concerned primarily with turning out students with specific technical or occupational skills, but with giving them a wider understanding of the world in which they live. The curriculum, therefore, should revolve around broad concepts rather than specific skills; and in elementary and preschool education students are encouraged to develop habits of understanding, patience, tolerance, and hard work that will assist them later when they undertake more substantial studies. This is not to say that students cannot learn some important ideas at any age, but, in general, the early years of education prepare the student by developing the ability to undertake more in-depth work at a later point.

The lecture method also still has a place in the idealist's methodology, but lectures are viewed more as a means of stimulating thought than as merely a way of conveying information. In fact, some idealist teachers discourage note taking so students will concentrate on the basic ideas. To the idealist, the chief purpose of a lecture is to help students comprehend ideas. Idealists also use such methods as projects, supplemental activities, library research, and artwork. However, such diverse activities grow out of the topic of

26 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

study at hand. This illustrates the idealists' desire to show the unity of knowledge and their dislike for random and isolated activity.

One cardinal objective of idealism and idealistic education is the ancient Greek directive to "know thyself." Self-realization is, as noted previously, an important aim of education; hence, idealists stress the importance of self-directed activity. In essence, they believe that a true education occurs only within the individual self. Although teachers cannot get inside students' minds, they can provide materials and activities that influence learning, and the response of the learner to these materials and activities constitutes education. The sources of this action are personal and private because, to the idealist, all education is self-education. Teachers must recognize that they cannot always be present when learning occurs and should attempt to stimulate students so that learning continues even when the teacher is not present. The project method is one concrete example of such self-directed activity. The idealist insists only that the nature of any and all activities be on a high plane of thought.

Although not underemphasizing the development of a curriculum, idealists stress that the most important factor in education at any level is to teach students to think. The psychologist Jean Piaget and others have shown that it is reasonable to expect students to demonstrate some critical regard for the material they are exposed to at various stages of development, even with the nursery tales that are read to them at an early age.

Idealists generally agree that many educational materials used by students are inadequate. Although the materials might help teach such skills as reading, idealists prefer that such skills be taught in ways that also develop conceptual ability. One might argue that the McGuffey readers, widely used in schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, taught the student something in addition to reading; they fostered ideas about parental relationships, God, morality, and patriotism. A counterargument might be that these ideas were taught in rather dogmatic ways, but are the more recent sterile kind of supposedly nonbiased readers presently used in schools an improvement?

Although most idealists claim that they are opposed to the use of reading material for indoctrination, they do not see why reading material cannot, while they are helping a child learn how to read, encourage thinking about ideas involving humaneness, truth, and fair play. Since few books and materials for children forcibly express such ideas, that is why idealists believe that the teacher needs to encourage a consideration of such ideas in the classroom. The teacher can use curriculum materials to help students learn about the purpose of life, family, the nature of peer pressures, and the problems of growing up.

With older students, one can use reading materials that are more appropriate to their age: *Treasure Island*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *Peter Pan* are well written and lend themselves admirably to a discussion of ideas. For high school students, even more idea-engendering material is available: *The Iliad*, *Hamlet*, *Twice-Told Tales*, and *Wind, Sand, and Stars*. Because these materials are already used in some classrooms, one might wonder what is so special about the way idealists would use them. Idealists say that most teachers are not always trained in ways to utilize such books to maximize the ideas contained in them. They often become just another hurdle to get over, just a benchmark or list of books to be read.

Idealists believe that ideas can change lives. Christianity was once merely an idea, and so was Marxism, and such ideas have transformed whole societies. Idealists think that humans can become more noble and rational through thinking, and they encourage the use of the classics not only because they promote new ideas, but also because they provide a method for humanizing learning experiences. Idealists charge that schools

often neglect this important consideration of mind. They add that even when the classics are taught, students are required to memorize dates and names without due attention to the creative and humanizing aspects of such books. Idealists believe that creativity is encouraged only when students are immersed in the creative thinking of others and when they are **stimulated to think reflectively**.

Although some idealist educators stress classical studies, this does not mean that such studies are all they emphasize. Indeed, some idealists recommend studies that are **distinctly modern**. For example, Harris developed a curriculum **centered around five studies: mathematics and physics; biology; literature and art; grammar; and history**. Horne suggested **seven major studies: physics, biology, psychology, mathematics, grammar, literature, and history**. Harris and Horne believed that these areas are important and broad enough to fit into a good idealist curriculum.

The sciences are represented heavily in both of these recommendations. This indicates that such idealists as Harris and Horne did not disregard the development of new knowledge. Neither saw any incompatibility between studies in the liberal arts and the natural sciences. In fact, they maintained that a more complete understanding of the universe necessitates studies in both the arts and the sciences.



Role of the Teacher

The idealist emphasizes the importance of the teacher. The teacher should not only understand the various stages of learning but also maintain constant concern about the ultimate purposes of learning. Some idealists stress the importance of emulation in learning because they believe that the teacher should be **the kind of person we want our children to become**, and idealists have often used **Socrates as a prototype** of learning and as a model for emulation.

Butler maintains that modern **idealist educators** like to think of themselves as **creators of methods** rather than as mere imitators. They prefer alternative ways of approaching learning, but they still like to see at least an informal dialectic in operation. In **questioning and discussion sessions** during which the **dialectic** operates, the teacher can help students see alternatives they might otherwise have missed. Although the dialectical process can be informal, it should not become a mere pooling of the ignorance of immature students; the teacher should participate fully in order to maintain the integrity of the process.

Idealists have given considerable **attention** not only to the search for truth, but also to the **persons involved in it**. Idealists favor the **teacher who is philosophically oriented**, one who can assist students in choosing important material and infuse them with a desire to improve their thinking in the deepest possible way. Perhaps the best way to understand this is by looking at Socrates as a prototype of the teacher the idealists would prefer. **Socrates spent much time analyzing and discussing ideas with others**, and he was deeply committed to action based on reflection. The idealist-oriented teacher would seek to have these Socratic characteristics and would encourage **students to better their thinking** and their lives on the basis of such thinking. Idealists are, in general, greatly concerned with **character development**, which they believe should be one of the foremost goals of a good education, and they believe that **the teacher should have a good character** as well.

Idealist philosophy is also concerned with **the student** as one who **has enormous potential for moral and cognitive growth**, and the idealist tends to see the individual as a person whose **moral values** need to be considered and **developed by school activities**.

28 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

Although the idealist might not always be willing to give “evil” an objective existence, it is present in the sense that students may choose things that are harmful. Therefore, idealists maintain, the school has an obligation to present students with ideal models for development, and they would agree with Plato that ideas should be presented in ways that students can use for both knowledge and guidance.

From the idealist’s perspective, the teacher is in a unique and important position. The teacher’s duty is to encourage students to ask questions and to provide a suitable environment for learning. The teacher exercises judgment about the kinds of materials that are most important and encourages diligent study of material that is of more ultimate worth. In this view, teaching is a high moral calling, and teachers should serve as exemplary models—persons after whom students can pattern their lives.

The idealist position has ramifications for the way we look at the individual. Rather than seeing people simply as biological organisms in nature, idealists see them as the possessors of an “inner light,” a mind or soul. For religious idealists, the student is important as a creation of God and carries within some of the godliness that the school should seek to develop, and most idealists, whether religious or not, have a deep feeling about the individual’s inner powers (such as intuition), which must be accounted for in any true education. Too much of what passes for education, they feel, deals with filling a person with something rather than bringing out what is already there—the truths that already exist. Plato spoke of the *Doctrine of Reminiscence*, whereby the soul regains the true knowledge it lost by being placed in the “prison house” of the body. The dialectic, then, according to Plato, becomes a tool for regaining this lost wisdom.

Augustine thought that truth is inherent in the soul of the individual. Education is the process of bringing these truths to the surface, and because many of these truths are directly related to God, according to many religious realists, education can also be a process of salvation. Thus, education can be performed through the dialectic, contemplation, intuition, and other ways to bring out truths already possessed by the soul. This outlook on education was characteristic of medieval monastic education, in which salvation was to be achieved not only by good works, but also through meditation. Even today, many religious institutions practice such an approach as a part of students’ education, and they set aside a portion of time for students to meditate on ultimate meanings.


CRITIQUE OF IDEALISM IN EDUCATION

Idealism often is considered a conservative or even antiquated philosophy of education because much of its thrust is to preserve lasting truths or cultural traditions. This is borne out by an examination of idealists’ concern for perennial and ultimate truths and their notion that education is largely a matter of passing on the cultural heritage. Adherents still point to the strengths of idealism, such as the following:

- The high cognitive level of education that idealists promote.
- Their concern for safeguarding and promoting cultural learning.
- Their great concern for morality and character development.
- Their view of the teacher as a revered person central to the educational process.
- Their belief in the importance of self-realization.
- Their stress on the human and personal side of life.
- Their comprehensive, systematic, and holistic approach.

Historically, the influence of idealism on education has been so strong that even today it is hard to find schools that do not in some way reflect idealist principles. Many of our earliest universities saw themselves as having a religious mission, and the first benefactor of Harvard was John Harvard, an English clergyman. Emerson went to Harvard and was a graduate of the Harvard Divinity School. When Thomas Jefferson founded the University of Virginia in 1819, it was unique as the first secular university not devoted to turning out ministers or promoting any one religious position as was done at Yale, Dartmouth, and Princeton, as well as at the College of William and Mary that Jefferson had attended. Thus, although idealism's influence has suffered in recent decades, no other philosophy has affected education, both lower and higher education, for so long a time. Beginning with Plato in the fourth century B.C.E., through Scholasticism in the Middle Ages, to Kant and Hegel, and up to the twenty-first century, idealism has been a strong and significant force in education.

In recent years, however, several factors have contributed to a weakening of idealist philosophy. Industrialization and technological advances have taken their toll, and developments in science have brought about fundamental challenges to idealistic principles. We live in a very materialist culture, and the renewed vigor of secular realism and other naturalistic philosophies result from the increased emphasis put on the material as opposed to the ideal aspects of life. In addition, the contemporary emphasis on newness as opposed to cultural heritage and lasting values has further eroded traditional idealist positions.

Many idealists insist  certain ideas contained in traditional writings, some written more than 2,000 years ago, are as relevant today as they were before. They maintain, with Ecclesiastes, that "There is nothing new under the sun" because many of the problems that we face today are problems that philosophers and others faced long ago. Plato, for example, dealt extensively with the problems of government, society, individuality, and language, which are still being vigorously argued today, and Aristotle, who extolled many ideas that idealists like, was a scientist as well as a philosopher. Idealists continue to argue that their ideas are not necessarily incompatible with scientific ideas and the methods of science, as many critics claim.

Yet, opponents of idealism react strongly against what they feel to be the unduly conservative nature of idealism. In effect, they object primarily to its fundamental premises. For example, they think that the idealist notion of a finished and absolute universe waiting to be discovered has hindered progress in science and the creation of new ideas and processes. If one accepts the concept of absolute ideas, it is not possible to go beyond those ideas without questioning or doubting their absoluteness. This was one chief problem that modern science had in gaining acceptance, because science is premised on tentativeness and hypotheses rather than on absoluteness. Indeed, modern science is characterized today by such ideas as that of physicist Werner Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle, which holds that one cannot accurately measure simultaneously the position and the momentum of a subatomic particle; that is, the act of measuring one property will alter the other. In addition, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity has also been used to challenge the assertion of idealists of a fixed or stable universe.

Still another cause of the weakening of idealism is the historical decline of the influence of traditional religion in contemporary affairs. Because idealism has been linked intimately with traditional religion, the weakening of the one has led to the weakening of the other. Indications are, however, that the decline in religion might be changing. Although

30 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

the influence of traditional organized religion has decreased, interest has increased in other forms of spirituality, such as mysticism and New Age beliefs that often incorporate classical ideas. Various Eastern religions have also been transformed and have taken on new roles that make them more acceptable and relevant to contemporary thought. In addition, a resurgence of evangelical Christianity in recent years has placed considerable emphasis on education, especially education of the young, and such education often extols idealist principles.

From the standpoint of education, several issues need further scrutiny. The idealist influence on education has been immense historically, but some feel that influence might not always have been beneficial. Although idealist education has emphasized not only the spiritual but also the cognitive side of life, charges are that it has tended toward intellectualism to the detriment of the affective and physical sides of life. It also has often ignored the belief of many people who find its cognitive emphasis narrow and pedantic, and this has further led to the charge that idealism leans toward a narrow, provincial view of life or toward intellectual elitism.

The problem of elitism goes deep into idealism's roots. Plato advocated an intellectual elite of philosopher-kings. Augustine argued for the superiority of the monastic life over the secular one because of the higher quality of minds and intelligence to be found there; monks were a select group set aside for special treatment. Thus, idealists have tended to view formal education as not for the masses but for a chosen few who could understand and appreciate it properly; consequently, they have concentrated on education for the upper classes of society, particularly those going into leadership positions in academic careers, government, or religion. This factor often has led formal education to be treated as a luxury, available only to the privileged few. To the extent that idealist educators have tried to extend only a small degree of intellectual studies to the public sector, the view seems to be that vocational and technical studies are sufficient for the masses, whereas liberal studies are suitable only for an elite class of people. Although not all idealists have thought this way, the tendency toward elitism is strong.

John Paul Strain, a contemporary writer, stated that one has to go back several years in the journals on education to find an article on idealism. One might think that this conspicuous absence indicates that idealism is no longer a viable philosophy of education, yet, according to Strain, the reverse is true. When people refer to idealism as a philosophy of education, they generally mean Hegelian idealism, which was dominant in the nineteenth century and influenced such thinkers as Dewey and Horne. Although it is difficult today to find philosophers of education who are true idealists, idealism does still exist in the thought patterns of American education because of its strong emphasis on heritage and culture, reading and writing, intelligence, and morality. We might also add to this list such things as respect for parental authority, law and order, discipline, and patriotism. Strain says that the thought pattern of idealism also encourages progress, strong institutions, self-control, discipline, and the importance of education.

Strain's views might reflect why many philosophers of education have not wished to be identified with idealism—with its religious character on the one hand and its sometimes subservience to political or religious authority on the other. Hegel believed that the best form of government was a constitutional monarchy, and Strain favors a similar approach to government today. Strain is correct when he says that idealism still flourishes as a historical pattern of conservative thought that continues to exert a powerful influence on present ways of thinking.

Some believe that Hegel's idealistic philosophy, rather than promoting subservience, has influenced educational philosophies of liberation. According to Carlos Torres, Hegelian philosophy had a major impact on the thought of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian philosopher of education in the late twentieth century. Although phenomenology, existentialism, Christian personalism, and humanist Marxism heavily influenced Freire, Hegel's idealist philosophy was a key element in his political thought, especially as developed in his best-known work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire used Hegelian dialectics to analyze the relationships between self-consciousness and social consciousness, as well as how such dialectical tensions figure in domination, fear, and cultural transformation.

However, Freire went beyond Hegel's logical structures to a synthesis that is political and transformative. For Freire, education involves the act of knowing, but it is not merely transmitting facts, and it is not necessarily carried out in classrooms. Traditional concepts of education should be secondary to the kind of education that is based on shared experience and critical reflection. The crucial element of education is not wrapped up in the Hegelian dialectic as logical argumentation, but in going beyond the logical structures of reason to actual practice (or *praxis*) in the experienced world. Thus, education can move beyond idealism to emancipation and liberation in the world of actual experience.

According to Torres, the foundation of Freire's philosophical and educational methodology lies in heightened conscious awareness and socially transformative action. Like Hegel, Freire believed education is an act of theoretical and practical reason, but it also should have political consequences leading to liberation from dominating oppression of the masses and oppressions related to class, race, and gender.

Despite its generalist approach to studies, idealism, as previously indicated, is also susceptible to the charge of shortsightedness with regard to the affective and physical aspects of human nature. If we include in our definition of *affective* not only the aesthetic but also the emotional and personal-social side of life, then such a charge gains credence. An idealist curriculum can be overly intellectual and bookish, and although attending to books is not bad in itself, if we fail to recognize the emotional, physical, and social needs of students, then we are not attending to the complete persons they are and can become.

Idealists claim to be holistic and universal, yet when their cognitive and bookish approach becomes extreme, they seem to fail to take their own advice about holism. For example, it is one thing to learn about human nature from reading enduring scholarly treatises on the subject, but it is another to engage purposefully in social relationships with fellow human beings in the everyday world. Reading extensively about "goodness" does not make someone good. Consequently, idealist knowledge often is seen as only arm-chair knowledge rather than providing the kind of insight that comes from interaction with other people.

In recent years the charge that the idealists are out of date has become greater, and the idealist curriculum has come increasingly under attack for lacking relevance to the real world. The extent to which some idealists concentrate primarily on works and ideas of the past lends great credibility to this charge. Certainly, the great writings of the past might provide insights, and we should study them, but this does not mean that we should not consider contemporary ideas and writings as perhaps equally important, and we need to realize that many contemporary ideas and writings will become classics at a later date.

32 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

One claim made by idealists is that they give more attention to the development of character than do advocates of other philosophies. This is probably true, but it also raises serious questions as to why idealists are so concerned with character development and what kind of character they want to develop. Often, what purports to be character development in idealist philosophy may be conformity and subservience on the part of the learner. Harris, for example, said that the first rule to be taught to students is order, and that students should be taught to conform to general standards and to repress everything that interferes with the function of the school. More explicitly, students should have their lessons ready on time, rise at the tap of the bell, and learn habits of silence and cleanliness. One might well question whether this is character development or training for docility.

This kind of character training might assist in educational and social stability, but it is often at the expense of creativity and self-direction. The kind of character training that idealists promote also might make students gullible—willing to accept ready-made ideas without serious examination. Many of the so-called great ideas, for example, rest on premises or assumptions that are questionable and, in the final analysis, might be socially harmful. Gentile and Royce, for example, spent much time dealing with the concept of loyalty as central to the development of character. Although loyalty might be socially useful in some cases, it could also be harmful when it encourages the learner to submerge all questioning and intellectual independence with regard to concepts involving church, state, family, or school.

Some modern idealists, such as J. Donald Butler, emphasize the self-realization aspect of character education, yet such self-realization often is seen as a derivative of a Universal Self. Hence, even under a softer idealist approach, the Individual Self is subsumed under a larger and more important concern—that is, the Universal Self or God. This line of reasoning can be traced back to Hegel, who saw the individual person achieving meaning only by serving a higher purpose.

Another aspect of idealist philosophy that deserves attention is the contention that the primary function of philosophy is to search for and disseminate truth. One finds this view elaborated by Plato, who believed that truth is perfect and eternal. Even today, idealists point out that the search for wisdom is a search for truth—an ongoing pursuit that each new generation of students must undertake, although the final answers might be the same. This viewpoint could lead to a type of staticism—the assumption that we have the truth already at hand. The danger in this belief is that it may discourage a search for new ideas and could develop into dogmatism and a false sense of security. Although idealists maintain that modern individuals are too relativistic and tentative in their thinking, the absoluteness of many idealists might be a more serious weakness.

It should be pointed out that this attitude of absoluteness characterizes only some idealists; others have a more pluralistic conception of truth, maintaining that there might be many truths rather than one, a concept that leads, they believe, to intellectual stimulation, not stagnation. Like other philosophies, idealism has many shades and meanings, and it would be grossly unfair to lump all idealists together. Each thinker describes or reinterprets ideas in light of his or her own intellectual and lived experiences, and no two persons have exactly the same. Idealists do, however, share the view that the right kind of education is important even as they differ on what “right” really means and the paths we should take.

PLATO

THE REPUBLIC

The Republic often has been considered one of the greatest expressions of idealist philosophy and Plato's most thorough statement on education. Writing in the fourth century B.C.E., Plato described his utopian view of human society. It was not unusual for him to depict central ideas in allegorical format. In this selection, he shows Socrates attempting to explain how achieving higher levels of thought (thinking philosophically) is akin to prisoners escaping from their shadowy prison inside a cave. Plato demonstrates the painful difficulty of the ascent toward wisdom and its potentially dangerous consequences. Many scholars believe that the story parallels Socrates' life and death.

And now, I said, let me show in a figure how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened:—Behold! human beings living in an underground den, which has a mouth open towards the light and reaching all along the den; here they have been from their childhood, and have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move, and can only see before them, being prevented by the chains from turning round their heads. Above and behind them a fire is blazing at a distance, and between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised way; and you will see, if you look, a low wall built along the way, like the screen which marionette players have in front of them, over which they show the puppets.

I see.

And do you see, I said, men passing along the wall carrying all sorts of vessels, and statues and figures of animals made of wood and stone and various materials, which appear over the wall? Some of them are talking, others silent.

You have shown me a strange image, and they are strange prisoners.

Like ourselves, I replied; and they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which the fire throws on the opposite wall of the cave?

True, he said; how could they see anything but the shadows if they were never allowed to move their heads?

And of the objects which are being carried in like manner they would only see the shadows?

Yes, he said.

And if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?

Very true.

And suppose further that the prison had an echo which came from the other side, would they not be sure to fancy when one of the passers-by spoke that the voice which they heard came from the passing shadow?

No question, he replied.

To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images.

That is certain.

And now look again, and see what will naturally follow if the prisoners are released and disabused of their error. At first, when any of them is liberated and compelled suddenly to stand up and turn his neck round and walk and look towards the light, he will suffer sharp pains; the glare will distress him, and he will be unable to see the realities of which in his former state he had seen the shadows; and then conceive some one saying to him, that what he saw before was an illusion, but that now, when he is approaching nearer to being and his eye is turned towards more real existence, he has a clearer vision,—what will be his reply? And you may further imagine that his instructor is pointing to the objects as they pass and requiring him to name them,—will he not be perplexed? Will he not fancy that the shadows which he formerly saw are truer than the objects which are now shown to him?

34 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

Far truer.

And if he is compelled to look straight at the light, will he not have a pain in his eyes which will make him turn away to take refuge in the objects of vision which he can see, and which he will conceive to be in reality clearer than the things which are now being shown to him?

True, he said.

And suppose once more, that he is reluctantly dragged up a steep and rugged ascent, and held fast until he is forced into the presence of the sun himself, is he not likely to be pained and irritated? When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.

Not all in a moment, he said.

He will require to grow accustomed to the sight of the upper world. And first he will see the shadows best, next the reflections of men and other objects in the water, and then the objects themselves; then he will gaze upon the light of the moon and the stars and the spangled heaven; and he will see the sky and the stars by night better than the sun or the light of the sun by day?

Certainly.

Last of all he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in the water, but he will see him in his own proper place, and not in another; and he will contemplate him as he is.

Certainly.

He will then proceed to argue that this is he who gives the season and the years, and is the guardian of all that is in the visible world, and in a certain way the cause of all things which he and his fellows have been accustomed to behold?

Clearly, he said, he would first see the sun and then reason about him.

And when he remembered his old habitation, and the wisdom of the den and his fellow-prisoners, do you not suppose that he would felicitate himself on the change, and pity them?

Certainly, he would.

And if they were in the habit of conferring honors among themselves on those who were quickest to observe the passing shadows and to remark which of them went before, and which

followed after, and which were together; and who were therefore best able to draw conclusions as to the future, do you think that he would care for such honors and glories, or envy the possessors of them? Would he not say with Homer, "Better to be the poor servant of a poor master," and to endure anything, rather than think as they do and live after their manner?

Yes, he said, I think that he would rather suffer anything than entertain these false notions and live in this miserable manner.

Imagine once more, I said, such a one coming suddenly out of the sun to be replaced in his old situation; would he not be certain to have his eyes full of darkness?

To be sure, he said.

And if there were a contest, and he had to compete in measuring the shadows with the prisoners who had never moved out of the den, while his sight was still weak, and before his eyes had become steady (and the time which would be needed to acquire this new habit of sight might be very considerable), would he not be ridiculous? Men would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes; and that it was better not even to think of ascending; and if any one tried to loose another and lead him up to the light, let them only catch the offender, and they would put him to death.

No question, he said.

This entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief, which, at your desire, I have expressed—whether rightly or wrongly God knows. But, whether true or false, my opinion is that in the world of knowledge the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon

which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

I agree, he said, as far as I am able to understand you.

Moreover, I said, you must not wonder that those who attain to this beatific vision are unwilling to descend to human affairs; for their souls are ever hastening into the upper world where they desire to dwell; which desire of theirs is very natural, if our allegory may be trusted.

Yes, very natural.

And is there anything surprising in one who passes from divine contemplations to the evil state of man, misbehaving himself in a ridiculous manner; if, while his eyes are blinking and before he has become accustomed to the surrounding darkness, he is compelled to fight in courts of law, or in other places, about the images or the shadows of images of justice, and is endeavoring to meet the conceptions of those who have never yet seen absolute justice?

Anything but surprising, he replied.

Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too

ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will count the one happy in his condition and state of being, and he will pity the other; or, if he have a mind to laugh at the soul which comes from below into the light, there will be more reason in this than in the laugh which greets him who returns from above out of the light into the den.

That, he said, is a very just distinction.

But then, if I am right, certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes.

They undoubtedly say this, he replied.

Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.

Source: Plato, *The Republic*, translated by B. Jowett. New York: Dolphin Books, 1960, pp. 205–208.

IMMANUEL KANT

EDUCATION

Kant believed that education is “the greatest and most difficult problem to which man can devote himself.” In the following selection, he shows how education can be used to shape human character through maxims, or enduring principles for human activity. Although written in the eighteenth century, this essay shows a decidedly contemporary concern for child development and learning through activities. Kant stressed character development and a commitment to duty. This concern is illustrated in his descriptions of various maxims and how they should give certain results.

36 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

Moral culture must be based upon “maxims,” not upon discipline; the one prevents evil habits, the other trains the mind to think. We must see, then, that the child should accustom himself to act in accordance with “maxims,” and not from certain ever-changing springs of action. Through discipline we form certain habits, moreover, the force of which becomes lessened in the course of years. The child should learn to act according to “maxims,” the reasonableness of which he is able to see for himself. One can easily see that there is some difficulty in carrying out this principle with young children, and that moral culture demands a great deal of insight on the part of parents and teachers.

Supposing a child tells a lie, for instance, he ought not to be punished, but treated with contempt, and told that he will not be believed in the future, and the like. If you punish a child for being naughty, and reward him for being good, he will do right merely for the sake of the reward; and when he goes out into the world and finds that goodness is not always rewarded, nor wickedness always punished, he will grow into a man who only thinks about how he may get on in the world, and does right or wrong according as he finds either of advantage to himself.

“Maxims” ought to originate in the human being as such. In moral training we should seek early to infuse into children ideas as to what is right and wrong. If we wish to establish morality, we must abolish punishment. Morality is something so sacred and sublime that we must not degrade it by placing it in the same rank as discipline. The first endeavor in moral education is the formation of character. Character consists in readiness to act in accordance with “maxims.” At first they are school “maxims,” and later “maxims” of mankind. At first the child obeys rules. “Maxims” are also rules, but subjective rules. They proceed from the understanding of man. No infringement of school discipline must be allowed to go unpunished, although the punishment must always fit the offence.

If we wish to *form the characters* of children, it is of the greatest importance to point out to them a certain plan, and certain rules, in every-

thing; and these must be strictly adhered to. For instance, they must have set times for sleep, for work, and for pleasure; and these times must be neither shortened nor lengthened. With indifferent matters children might be allowed to choose for themselves, but having once made a rule they must always follow it. We must, however, form in children the character of a child, and not the character of a citizen. . . .

Above all things, obedience is an essential feature in the character of a child, especially of a school boy or girl. This obedience is twofold, including absolute obedience to his master's commands, and obedience to what he feels to be a good and reasonable will. Obedience may be the result of compulsion; it is then *absolute*. Or it may arise out of confidence; it is then obedience of the second kind. This *voluntary* obedience is very important, but the former is also very necessary, for it prepares the child for the fulfillment of laws that he will have to obey later, as a citizen, even though he may not like them.

Children, then, must be subject to a certain law of *necessity*. This law, however, must be a general one—a rule which has to be kept constantly in view, especially in schools. The master must not show any predilection or preference for one child above others; for thus the law would cease to be general. As soon as a child sees that the other children are not all placed under the same rules as himself, he will at once become refractory.

One often hears it said that we should put everything before children in such a way that they shall do it from *inclination*. In some cases, it is true, this is all very well, but there is much besides which we must place before them as *duty*. And this will be of great use to them throughout their life. For in the paying of rates and taxes, in the work of the office, and in many other cases, we must be led, not by inclination, but by duty. Even though a child should not be able to see the reason of a duty, it is nevertheless better that certain things should be prescribed to him in this way; for, after all, a child will always be able to see that he has certain duties as a child, while it will be more difficult for

him to see that he has certain duties as a human being. Were he able to understand this also—which, however, will only be possible in the course of years—his obedience would be still more perfect.

Every transgression of a command in a child is a want of obedience, and this brings *punishment* with it. Also, should a command be disobeyed through inattention, punishment is still necessary. This punishment is either *physical* or *moral*. It is *moral* when we do something derogatory to the child's longing to be honored and loved (a longing which is an aid to moral training); for instance, when we humiliate the child by treating him coldly and distantly. This longing of children should, however, be cultivated as much as possible. Hence this kind of punishment is the best, since it is an aid to moral training—for instance, if a child tells a lie, a look of contempt is punishment enough, and punishment of a most appropriate kind.

Physical punishment consists either in refusing a child's requests or in the infliction of pain. The first is akin to moral punishment, and is of a negative kind. The second form must be used with caution, lest an *indoles servilis* should be the result. It is of no use to give children rewards; this makes them selfish, and gives rise to an *indoles mercenaria*.

Further, obedience is either that of the child or that of the *youth*. Disobedience is always followed by punishment. This is either a really *natural* punishment, which a man brings upon himself by his own behavior—for instance, when a child gets ill from overeating—and this kind of punishment is the best, since a man is subject to it throughout his life, and not merely during his childhood; or, on the other hand, the punishment is artificial. By taking into consideration the child's desire to be loved and respected, such punishments may be chosen as will have a lasting effect upon its character. Physical punishments must merely supplement the insufficiency of moral punishment. If moral punishment have no effect at all, and we have at last to resort to physical punishment, we shall find after all that no good character is formed in

this way. At the beginning, however, physical restraint may serve to take the place of reflection.

Punishments inflicted with signs of *anger* are useless. Children then look upon the punishment simply as the result of anger, and upon themselves merely as the victims of that anger; and as a general rule punishment must be inflicted on children with great caution, that they may understand that its one aim is their improvement. It is foolish to cause children, when they are punished, to return thanks for the punishment by kissing hands, and only turns the child into a slave. If physical punishment is often repeated, it makes a child stubborn; and if parents punish their children for obstinacy, they often become all the more obstinate. Besides, it is not always the worst men who are obstinate, and they will often yield easily to kind remonstrance.

The obedience of the growing *youth* must be distinguished from the obedience of the *child*. The former consists in submission to rules of duty. To do something for the sake of duty means obeying reason. It is in vain to speak to children of duty. They look upon it in the end as something which if not fulfilled will be followed by the rod. A child may be guided by mere instinct. As he grows up, however, the idea of duty must come in. Also the idea of shame should not be made use of with children, but only with those who have left childhood for youth. For it cannot exist with them till the idea of honor has first taken root.

The second principal feature in the formation of a child's character is *truthfulness*. This is the foundation and very essence of character. A man who tells lies has no character, and if he has any good in him it is merely the result of a certain kind of temperament. Some children have an inclination towards lying, and this frequently for no other reason than that they have a lively imagination. It is the father's business to see that they are broken of this habit, for mothers generally look upon it as a matter of little or no importance, even finding in it a flattering proof of the cleverness and ability of their children. This is the time to make use of the sense of shame, for the child in this case will understand it well. The

38 Chapter 1 • Idealism and Education

blush of shame betrays us when we lie, but it is not always a proof of it, for we often blush at the shamelessness of others who accuse us of guilt. On no condition must we punish children to force the truth from them, unless their telling a lie immediately results in some mischief; *then* they may be punished for that mischief. The withdrawal of respect is the only fit punishment for lying.

Punishments may be divided into *negative* and *positive* punishments. The first may be applied to laziness or viciousness; for instance, lying, disobedience. Positive punishment may be applied to acts of spitefulness. But above all things we must take care never to bear children a grudge.

A third feature in the child's character is *sociableness*. He must form friendships with other children, and not be always by himself. Some teachers, it is true, are opposed to these friendships in schools, but this is a great mistake. Children ought to prepare themselves for the sweetest enjoyment of life.

If a teacher allows himself to prefer one child to another, it must be on account of its character, and not for the sake of any talents the child may possess; otherwise jealousy will arise, which is opposed to friendship.

Children ought to be open-hearted and cheerful in their looks as the sun. A joyful heart alone is able to find its happiness in the good. A religion which makes people gloomy is a false religion; for we should serve God with a joyful heart, and not of constraint.

Children should sometimes be released from the narrow constraint of school, otherwise their natural joyousness will soon be quenched. When the child is set free he soon recovers his natural elasticity. Those games in which children, enjoying perfect freedom, are ever trying to

outdo one another, will serve this purpose best, and they will soon make their minds bright and cheerful again. . . .

Children should only be taught those things which are suited to their age. Many parents are pleased with the precocity of their offspring; but as a rule, nothing will come of such children. A child should be clever, but only as a child. He should not ape the manners of his elders. For a child to provide himself with moral sentences proper to manhood is to go quite beyond his province and to become merely an imitator. He ought to have merely the understanding of a child, and not seek to display it too early. A precocious child will never become a man of insight and clear understanding. It is just as much out of place for a child to follow all the fashions of the time, to curl his hair, wear ruffles, and even carry a snuff-box. He will thus acquire affected manners not becoming to a child. Polite society is a burden to him, and he entirely lacks a man's heart. For that very reason we must set ourselves early to fight against all signs of vanity in a child; or, rather, we must give him no occasion to become vain. This easily happens by people prattling before children, telling them how beautiful they are, and how well this or that dress becomes them, and promising them some finery or other as a reward. Finery is not suitable for children. They must accept their neat and simple clothes as necessities merely.

At the same time the parents must not set great store by their own clothes, nor admire themselves; for here, as everywhere, example is all-powerful, and either strengthens or destroys good precepts.

Source: Immanuel Kant, *Education*, translated by Annette Charton. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960, pp. 83–94.

